

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

**Please cancel claims 12-22 without prejudice or disclaimer, and replace with the following new claims. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:**

**LISTING OF CLAIMS:**

1-22. (canceled)

23. (new) A method for managing a protection mechanism in a ring network, wherein a network element is connected to an adjacent network element on a west side and to another adjacent network element on an east side, each side including incoming and exiting working channels for carrying information traffic and including incoming and exiting protection channels for protecting said information traffic, the method including the steps of:

detecting a failure affecting incoming working and protection channels on the east side of said network element;

transmitting from the west side of said network element an indication of a performed ring switch for protecting information traffic over said failed working channel on the east side;

receiving a command for requesting suppression of said ring switch;

maintaining said performed ring switch; and

transmitting from said west side an indication of said performed ring switch and of said external command.

24. (new) A method according to claim 23, further including the steps of:

receiving said indication at said adjacent network element;

in case of detecting another failure affecting incoming working and protection channels on the west side of said adjacent network element, maintaining said performed ring switch, otherwise suppressing said ring switch.

25. (new) A method according to claim 24, further including the step of:

in case of detecting said other failure, transmitting from the east side of said adjacent network element another indication of said performed ring switch, otherwise transmitting another indication for requesting suppression of said ring switch.

26. (new) A method according to claim 23, wherein said indication is carried over a Multiplex Section of Synchronous Digital Hierarchy or a Synchronous Optical Network of an exiting protection channel on the west side of said network element, said Multiplex Section including a first field for indicating said performed ring switch and including a second field for indicating said external command.

27. (new) A method according to claim 26, wherein said first field is a Status field of a K2 byte and said second field is Bridge Request code field of the K2 byte, said Status field being assigned to binary value "0000" and said Bridge Request code field being assigned to binary value "010".